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## Daily 5 and Cafe Launch - Part 1 (Article)

*A Note from Gail and Joan ("The Sisters"): We are working on a new book about launching the school year, with much of the writing to be completed this fall and winter. As we work, we'll be sharing some of our drafts with Daily CAFÉ™ members. We'll start with a three-part excerpt from the beginning of the book which will run for the next few weeks. We hope it is just in time to help you think through the launch of your school year.*

### Part 1: A Delight and a Disaster: A Tale of Two Launches

What would a perfect first day with students look like for you? If you close your eyes and think about it, you probably see a full class of happy students, working away with books, papers and each other, a pleasant buzz of learning.

We start with the true story of two teachers -- we've changed their names to protect their identities. Mary and Tina have both been teaching for more than 15 years. They love their jobs, and the first graders they work with each day. In early August, they are two of the first teachers to start setting up their classrooms. They are always on the lookout in bookstores or scouring the web for terrific new children's literature titles to add to their class libraries. The young teachers in their schools learn quickly that Mary and Tina are the go-to colleagues for a sympathetic ear and wise advice when things go wrong. Why is it then that the first days in Mary and Tina's classrooms look so very different?

#### Nearly Hoarse Yet Still Nearly Perfect: Day 1 in Mary's Classroom

"This school will never smell better!" It's a silly thought that goes through Mary's head as she takes in a whiff of the clean hallways and carpets. After a summer of shampoo, fresh air, and some new paint, everything looks nearly new. Her eyes travel round the room, and there's a pinch of satisfaction as she surveys the desks set up in pods of four, the orderly classroom library she spent a full day rearranging, the stacks of paper and neat baskets of sharpened pencils on the shelves.

Two of the desk pods are especially close to the front of the room, ready for Mary to relocate the two most troublesome groups that emerge by the end of the week. The teaching station upfront has a new ELMO in a place of pride where the overhead long sat. There is at least one bulletin board in the room for each subject area, all with new posters and borders from the local teacher supply store. The Punctuation Board is something students can refer to all year long. The entire writing process is described in steps on another board.

Nametags are on all the desks, and as the children begin filtering in, Mary greets each one and leads them to the desks. There is a task for each child to start in on as they arrive -- a page to color. This is one of the favorite times of the whole year for Mary -- seeing each of these children pass the classroom threshold for the first time, and anticipating getting to know them all year long.

Once everyone has arrived, Mary launches into a lesson about supplies. She explains where they go, and the importance of putting everything back in its place. Then it is time to explain what is on each bulletin board, a "tease" for all the fun learning all year long. During the first day children are mostly quiet, even though the explanation takes almost an hour. The first day students are often a little shy, feeling their way. Amanda has her hands folded, silently taking it all in. Travis will bear some watching -- after ten minutes he is on his knees at his desk, rocking back and forth, fiddling with his box of markers and making faces at his

friend. The class begins to get fidgety, but Mary is happy at how well they attend to her talk. It was only last year that Dustin had the whole class in an uproar the first day within five minutes. Somehow he had snuck three snakes to school in his pocket, and released them at his pod as his personal introduction to the class. There is no drama yet with this group.

Because the students are beginning to get restless, it's time for the school tour. This will get everyone moving. Mary first takes five minutes to explain proper hall and line behavior, repeating the key points a few times. Even so, it's clear as students walk down the hallway that many missed the main points. This is expected for the first day, and even the first week -- Mary knows she will have to repeat the expectations at least 8-10 times before most students know the proper way to walk down the hall.

Back in the classroom, it's time to set up the pod or table groups. Mary tells each group they need to pick a name they want to identify their group. As expected, there is a Transformers Group, and more surprisingly, the Guinea Pigs group, though there is a heated argument before the name is chosen. Once again, Mary can breath a sigh of relief that every group has picked an appropriate moniker. Three years ago "The Farting Bandits" not only had to retile their group, but upended the first day schedule because of the need for an impromptu lesson on what the word "appropriate" means.

It's already nearly time for lunch and recess. In the last 30 minutes before preparing for lunch, students begin work on self-portraits that will line the walls. Mary talks at length about how to fill the page with bold, bright colors and shows a couple examples from last year's class. Even though many of the bulletin boards are full, the first week is mostly given over to art projects that will build community, beautify the room, and keep the students busy.

### **Mary's Day 1 Schedule**

- Greet Students
- Color During Arrival
- Explain Classroom Displays
- Lesson about Supplies
- School Tour (Hall Behavior Discussion)
- Selection of Table Group Names
- Self Portrait Art Project
- Lunch/Recess
- Read Aloud + Art Project
- Math lesson
- Explanation of Class Reward Point System
- I Like People Who" Game
- Preparation for Dismissal

After 15 years, Mary has finally learned that she will not get a lunch break for at least the first week. Too

much time needs to be given over to figuring out who gets hot lunch, who wants cold lunch, who brought their lunch, and who forgot their lunch. On the first day, everyone is lucky to have even five minutes to eat their lunch by the time they've discussed line behavior again and worked through what everyone is eating. Mary has a bag of protein bars that will tide her over until the lunch routines are learned by later next week.

Between duty and running papers down to the office, Mary checks in with colleagues and everyone catches up from the summer. As the children come back into the classrooms and find their seats, Mary opens the book she has selected for the first read-aloud, *Chrysanthemum*. She has a fun art project connected to the book which will help everyone learn names and some personal history from each child. Most students love sharing the story of their names.

It's time for a math lesson, which will be the first instruction from the required textbook. Mary passes out practice papers, and explains why it is so important to put your name at the top of the page, as well as the date. Much time is needed to explain why no one is allowed to write in the books. Even with 15 minutes of explanation, Mary knows she will need to talk about names and writing in books again tomorrow. The papers without names will go on the No Names board after school, and she'll need to spend some time erasing stray marks from the textbooks.

After the math lesson, tired students are ready for a break. The "I Like People Who" game is one Mary has used for years -- it's a version of musical chairs that gets students talking about their classmates. The game always ends in chaos as students figure out how to land in the center, but it's a fun chaos. At the end of the game, Mary awards her first behavior points to the whole class -- 5 points for staring straight ahead and paying attention to her at the end of the game. She puts the points on a board, and explains how the class will earn a pizza party once they have accumulated 100 points. Everyone cheers. Students don't know this, but Mary will award 10 points to the first child who receives a compliment from another teacher in the hallway. She will give at least three children 2 individual points for good behavior as they prepare to go home today. The point system is complicated and often a hassle, but the students seem to like working for the points and the system does promote good behavior.

Getting students onto buses the first day is a monumental hassle -- routes are always changing, and at least a few buses are late the first day after problems earlier with the high school route. But finally, finally, every child is gone.

Mary pauses for a moment in her quiet classroom after the last bell, savoring a few moments -- Gena's shy smile when she handed over her self-portrait, Cassie's boisterous hopping during the "I Like People" game, Max's careful and laborious writing of each letter in his name during the math lesson. She takes another sniff of the air -- it doesn't smell quite so fresh. Her plug-in air freshener is working overtime, and so will Mary tonight as she goes through her Big List of lessons she wants to get through this week (where did all the time go?). Mary's ready for a big mug of tea to soothe her aching throat. Not a perfect first day, but nearly perfect. Exhausted and exhilarated, Mary is reminded yet again that she has the most challenging job in the world. . .and she loves it.

We promised at the beginning of Mary's story that she is a real person -- and she is. Mary is a composite of everything the two of us (Joan and Gail) did to launch each school year before we created the Daily 5 and CAFÉ systems. But our school year launch doesn't look anything like Mary's now. We look back, and we see clearly why and how so many of the activities we did to launch the school year weren't as purposeful and systematic as they could be.

We are not fans of books or systems that set up the example of the "bad" teacher who is "saved" or "reborn" as brilliant and skilled once she adopts the new program/system/lesson series. We have always prided

ourselves on our skill and commitment as teachers -- we are sure you do, too. We've always been good teachers, just like you. We just found a way that worked better for us. In next week's Part II of this series, we'll describe how we now launch the school year with students.

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